

MIRACLE ON WINNETKA

ONE STORY OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE TURNAROUND

As I reflect on my time at Pierce, I realize that it was a wonderful fit between a college that was down on its luck but wanting to return to its years as a flagship college and a president who had been looking for a change and an opportunity to apply what he had learned over the previous 28 years. When I first arrived at Pierce, by and large the college community had lost hope. It reminded me of a drowning swimmer going down for the third time. In the beginning, many of the employees looked at me as “here comes another president who doesn’t know what he is doing, who will leave in a couple of years and then we will be even worse off than before his arrival, just like his predecessors.”

The Los Angeles Times declared the changes at Pierce College “the miracle on Winnetka”. When people hear about that dramatic turnaround at Pierce College within a five-year period (1999-2004), there are four common questions. First, what did the college do during those five years to create such a change? Second, how did it happen and, given the length of time of the problems, why did the turnaround occur at that particular time? Third, given the magnitude of the problems, what was the strategy for attacking them? Fourth, how did you come up with so many creative solutions?

With regard to the second question, two notable changes happened in 1999. The LACCD hired a new Chancellor (Mark Drummond) and Deputy Chancellor (Peter Landsberger), and I was hired as the new President for Pierce College. In the case of the new chancellor, it was not so much what he did to instigate the change, it was what he did not do. Former LACCD Chancellors often tried to tightly control their college presidents. However, Mark gave me enormous autonomy to turn the college around. He was also there at a few critical moments when I did not have the final authority to institute a change (e.g., changing the calendar) or I needed a district loan of some initial working capital to institute a planned change, or the board needed reassurance. Beyond those infrequent involvements, I was given the freedom to do what was necessary without district involvement. Both Mark and Peter (particularly Peter) were very supportive of what we were doing at Pierce. The trustees also gave me the autonomy to change the college. Pierce College had severe problems for a lengthy period of time prior to my arrival so as change occurred and some level of success was achieved, that autonomy grew. The condition of autonomy was requested by me when I was hired, but the important part was that it was honored and even enhanced. It demonstrated an investment in me and in the college that had not always existed in the past, and that investment was rewarded.

Autonomy by itself is irrelevant, so what occurred through my arrival to bring about all of that change at the college? In a previous book (*A Walk Through Leadership*), I discussed a series of leadership principles that worked for me during my career. Those same principles were very much utilized during the college reformation. However, in all fairness, those principles were often utilized at an unconscious level. For example, I did not say to myself, “now I need to apply the authentic listening principle.” Rather, I just made an effort to interact with as many people as

possible and without thinking about it, I applied the principle in the interactions. In essence, I can only recognize the use of different leadership principles in reflecting on what I did during those years while at Pierce. Most of these behaviors were simply characteristics and skills I developed during my life and particularly during my 28 years at Santa Monica College (SMC).

My genuine perception of everything we did as a college was an action by a collective group of people. Accordingly, I tried to always give recognition to that fact by using the pronoun “we” instead of “I”. Virtually every successful venture we did at Pierce involved multiple people, so this was giving actual credit to others and was not contrived. However, in writing this piece, I have used the pronoun “I” much more often than I am comfortable using in order to give you a better sense of what I was thinking and doing.

Besides leadership principles, it is also important to note an overarching approach to the challenges at Pierce. There are two quotations that I think summarize my global strategy at Pierce. The first is a paraphrased quote from Gary Wills, “A leader is someone who mobilizes people to work together to achieve a common vision.” The second quote is from David Gergen, “A leader’s role is to raise people’s aspirations for what they can become and to release their energies so they will try to get there.” These two quotes are important because I think they summarize what happened at Pierce. I didn’t change Pierce, the employees of Pierce College changed Pierce. I helped them create an environment of working together for a common vision with energy, enthusiasm and hope. However, it is important to remember that the employees brought about the change and created a culture of optimism and new ideas. When we talk about some of my specific strategies, ideas and leadership principles, my primary contribution was to define a common vision that everyone could support, to create an environment where everyone could work together (in part by mitigating the existing conflict and using the true meaning and spirit of participatory management), and infusing a sense of trust, optimism and hope.

For those of you who are not familiar with Pierce College, I have included a brief history from the current Pierce College website.

The college was founded in 1947 through the efforts of Clarence W. Pierce, M.D. The land for the college was purchased by the L.A. City School District (now the L.A. Unified School District). The original name of the college was the Clarence W. Pierce School of Agriculture.

From the early days when all the students were male agriculture majors come wonderful stories of on-campus dormitories, making ice cream on Friday afternoons and rain interrupting classes held in tin-roofed huts.

As the San Fernando Valley grew, the need for a comprehensive community college to serve the region was apparent. The college changed its name and its mission when it became Pierce College. Under John B. Shepard, the college’s core buildings were constructed and enrollment grew from a hundred or so in 1947 to more than 25,000 at its peak in the early 1980s.

Pierce College gained a new momentum under Darroch ”Rocky“ Young in 1999, an upward

trend which continues today. Under his direction, a visionary Master Plan for the land and the curriculum of the college was established with the support of the community both on and off campus.

Three bond measures passed just after the new millennium made possible a massive construction and renovation project that gave substance to the vision of the Master Plan.

While the College remains unique in the greater Los Angeles area because of its farm and its instructional program in agriculture, it may be best characterized by its broad range of instructional programs and as one of the most respected community colleges and transfer institutions in California.

The vision of Dr. Pierce has developed into a thriving educational and cultural center for the entire San Fernando Valley.

Upon reflection, during my time at Pierce, there were probably at least three different phases. The first phase was the primary building of the turnaround or renaissance. That lasted from June 1999 to October 2002. The second phase was dealing with the state financial crisis that had caused mid-year cuts and dealing with two locally approved bond issues. This phase went from November, 2002 to July 2003. The final phase was a transition from recovery to normalcy prior to my departure in January 2004.

How the Turnaround Happened

When I first arrived at Pierce, I did what every new president would do. I introduced myself to the college community. As expected, I met with all of the groups on campus (e.g. the Academic Senate, academic departments, service areas) and a separate meeting with the leaders of each group. I found that leaders were willing to have a more frank discussion apart from the whole group, so both were important. However, I tried to spend most of my time walking the campus and talking to people on a one-on-one basis in their place of work. It is a practice that I continued for my entire stay at Pierce. The “walking around” practice worked because I really enjoyed it and I tried to be a genuine listener. I wanted to hear the desires, concerns and perceptions of everyone and because we interacted on an individual basis, I think I received honest communication. Because of these discussions, I started to form a basis of trust, but more importantly I started to gain a true picture of the challenges facing the college and the elements of a common vision that seemed to be widely desired. Most of the faculty and staff had been at the college for an extended time and had clear recollections of Pierce College in its “hey day”. They had lost their pride in the college and many of them had retreated to doing their job or teaching their class and going home. (I even had people tell me they told people they worked at a community college without naming the college). They were calculating how long until they could retire. However, it was clear that they had assumed this position out of a survival necessity and not out of a desire to become disengaged. They wanted to have the college return to being a

preeminent institution and they wanted to be proud of where they worked. It was clear to me that if we could restore trust in the leadership and demonstrate the possibility of returning the college to preeminence, people would reengage.

Additionally, one of my positive discoveries was that even with all of the problems, the faculty had protected the academic integrity of the college and excellence in the classroom. The discovery of the transfer successes underscored that observation. Academic integrity is the core of a college and the hardest to change. It was a real relief and a source of my optimism that the academic quality was intact in virtually all programs. That really made this college turnaround an achievable objective and a basis of authentic optimism.

As a result of my individual and group interactions, I had the foundation of our common vision: to make Pierce the most successful college within the LACCD and then to be one of the preeminent community colleges in California. From those individual discussions, it was also clear what the important elements of the vision were in the minds of employees: financial stability, increased enrollment, physical aesthetics of the campus, status of the transfer, job training and agriculture programs, community support and resolution of the farm/golf conflict. This may seem simplistic but finding this common vision that was so universally held and desired within the college was an enormous help in pointing the way. I also genuinely believed we could do it and that optimism was undoubtedly part of all my communications and interactions. Too many institutions struggle because they cannot find that genuine common vision that energizes action. That was a major reason why our early success so quickly gained momentum.

While this was the positive impression from my original assessment, I did wonder how Pierce deteriorated into its current situation. I did not see any point in castigating my predecessors. I think they simply lacked the right experience or the breadth of experience to handle the very complex situation at Pierce and as the situation worsened, they became overwhelmed. Once declines start, they tend to feed on themselves and snowball. In Pierce's case, the challenges were interactive and required multiple simultaneous actions – a very difficult situation, especially for inexperienced leaders.

LEADERSHIP TEAM QUOTE

“Aside from all the tasks and activities that were involved, there was a great feeling of relief among the leadership group and beyond, that the person in charge (Rocky) knew what he was doing and there was hope that Pierce could reach its potential. I saw and felt how motivated people became because of that belief. There were so many important projects that were accomplished, but that feeling of camaraderie and optimism underlying all of it is what really sticks with me. “

Joy McCaslin, Vice President, Student Affairs

Another product of this “listening tour” was that I developed a list of the more specific challenges currently facing the college. When I was applying and interviewing for the

presidency, I heard about some of the challenges, but it was certainly a much shorter list. I would come home every night and tell my wife that today I learned about another problem that no one had told me about. In many cases, it was not that people knowingly withheld the information but rather a situation in which the problem had existed for so long they no longer “saw” the problem. Of course, I brought fresh eyes to the college campus. After the first few months of talking to people, I had compiled my list of the major challenges facing the college that needed to be fixed. These were only challenges outside of the usual issues faced by all college presidents (personnel problems, student discipline problems, union grievances, community use issues, etc.) The list ended up totaling 22 significant concerns. These concerns were so serious that I recognized any common vision necessitated solving these 22 problems in order to mobilize people and to help them work together. In many cases, solving the problem did not necessarily motivate people to work towards achieving the common vision, but it removed an obstacle. Of course, in some cases, it directly contributed to achieving the vision (e.g., increasing enrollment). Here is the list in no particular order.

1. The college was experiencing an annual operating deficit and needed to be financially supported by the district.
2. Student enrollment had declined from a high of approximately 24,000 students to less than 13,000 students. Besides affecting morale, this was the major contributor to the financial problems of the college. Furthermore, the college had a lower average class size, so they not only lacked students, but they were educating them at a higher average cost.
3. The college received a “deferred accreditation” in the prior team visit (1995) and a large part of the community worried that the college had lost (or will lose) their accreditation even though the deferral had been removed. There was also worry about the next visit in less than 2 years in 2001. Both were contributing to the enrollment decline.
4. Based on surveys and focus groups it was discovered that high school students within the college’s service area believed that two competing colleges (Moorpark and Santa Monica) had a much higher academic reputation that prospective students thought was based on actual student achievement at four-year colleges and universities. This was a major reason why Pierce was losing students to its competitors.
5. Santa Monica College was offering college classes in all of Pierce’s feeder high schools and had people onsite in those high schools to help students make college choices.
6. The physical appearance of the campus was extremely poor (nothing had been painted in recent years; lawns were not being watered, parking lots full of large potholes, etc.).
7. The full-time faculty had an average age of approximately 57 and there was only one under the age of 40.
8. The full-time/part-time faculty ratio was over 80%.
9. There had been no significant investment in technology and as an institution its technology looked like a college in the early 1980s (high school students said the technology was even less than what they had in their public high schools).

10. The college foundation was inoperable and may have violated its charter.
11. All local community leaders, including elected officials, had been alienated by the previous administration.
12. The two local newspapers (L.A. Times & Daily News) had been alienated by the previous administration and frequently wrote negative articles about the college (and rarely wrote positive ones).
13. The college had an annual tradition of holding a rodeo in the football stadium (which required replacing the turf every year) and the college rented land to Circus Vargas for their annual shows in the San Fernando Valley. As a result, the college was the primary object of demonstrations by the L.A. Chapter of PETA and other animal rights groups.
14. There had been no major capital project at the college for nearly 20 years and no significant investment in infrastructure.
15. A significant part of the campus did not have air conditioning even though Pierce is in Woodland Hills in the west end of the San Fernando Valley – one of the hottest spots in Los Angeles County.
16. There was a split inside the college and a comparable split in the community that created an extremely emotional conflict over an RFP to convert 200 acres of college land (used for the agriculture program) into a golf course (nearly 140 public speakers at a Board meeting two months before I was hired). It was known as the farm/golf conflict.
17. There was some level of “white flight” from the college because some people who lived west and south of the college felt it was unsafe to come to the college (while they perceived that Santa Monica and Moorpark were safe).
18. There was vacant land contiguous to the campus on the west side of the college that everyone thought was part of the college but actually belonged to a private developer. The developer was initiating a major apartment complex on the property and the misperception of the public was that the development was a college venture, which made the college the object of their opposition to the development.
19. The college had 7 presidents in the previous 10 years.
20. The shared governance process was cumbersome and redundant.
21. Employee morale was incredibly low (like a swimmer going down for the third time with no hope of rescue).
22. The college did not have a marketing plan or budget and seemed to lack a unique identity among prospective students. There was also no master plan, educational plan or facility plan.

Another critical observation, after spending extensive time with my direct reports, was that I did not have the right team. Correcting that problem was essential and took most of the first year, but it was an important priority. On the positive side, I inherited three great leaders – Joy McCaslin (Vice President of Student Affairs), Bill DeRubertis (Pierce Chapter President of the AFT Faculty Guild) and Izzy Goodman (Department Chair, Chemistry and Chair of the Department Chairs Group). The people who needed to be replaced, left under a variety of circumstances,

some with my encouragement. The Vice President of Academic Affairs was encouraged to look for other opportunities, which she found. The Academic Senate President died in office from natural causes and the Classified Union President/Chair of the Planning Council decided he was looking for a change. All of their replacements were wonderful (Barrie Logan as the new Academic Senate President, Debbie Suarens as the new Classified Union President and James Rikel as the Chair of the Planning Council). When I arrived, there was no Vice President of Administrative Services (and no money to hire a replacement so for 6 months, I did both jobs). I then hired a person of my own choosing (Tim Oliver). This group of nine (including at times the current student body president) created a magnificent senior policy group who helped me collectively and each made a major contribution individually (they have been cited throughout the report). The turnaround at Pierce College would not have been possible without the efforts, guidance and wisdom of this Leadership Group.

All of the first year was spent building relationships. However, when I thought about the list of 22 challenges, I knew I needed to bring focus to the list. I felt the highest priority was to stop the farm/golf conflict. I wasn't necessarily trying to solve it, but I felt the conflict had to stop. I needed people to work together on all of the other problems and I didn't want energy diverted to this conflict. Related to this conflict was the need for a financial plan to at least operate the college without generating a deficit. At root, it was this financial problem that gave rise to the farm/golf conflict, and it would help to diffuse that conflict if we at least had a financial plan for the short term while we wrestled with the long-term issue of the college's land assets. Within this financial analysis, two things quickly emerged. The biggest contributor to the college expense problem was that it was operating with an 83% full-time/part-time faculty ratio. Most colleges in the state were below 70% and a significant number were markedly lower. The disproportionate ratio affected salaries and benefits. Both were consuming a disproportionate amount of the Pierce budget. We had to get that number down. The other major component was the need to stop the enrollment decline and actually grow the enrollment. It is unquestionably the major revenue contributor and if we were cautious about controlling expenses in generating the growth, the net revenue increase would be able to solve the finance problem. Within the enrollment solution were three initial components: increase and improve the marketing efforts, change the academic calendar, and restore a quality high school outreach program.

While these were the highest (team building, finance and farm/golf) priorities, there were two other issues that needed to be on our radar. The WASC visit in 2001 needed to be successful and we could not wait on the development of the report and the necessary changes. We could not afford another troubling report from the Accreditation Commission. We also needed to pay attention to the poor physical aesthetics of the campus – in particular, the lack of air conditioning, the primary student parking lot (parking lot 7), the building exteriors and the landscaping. Both of these areas hurt the enrollment and helping to fix them would help with generating enrollment growth. While trying to run the college with all of the usual problems, we had these five major priorities, with finance having the very large component of increasing enrollment.

Anyway you look at it, this was an enormous task for a new president. Because of my knowledge and experience, I knew that my leadership would need to be central to each of these efforts. However, without secondary or co leaders, I would be spread too thin. That is why the assembled team was so critical. Most of the team members individually served as one of these support leaders and the group as a whole advised on the resolutions.

Farm/Golf Conflict. Contrary to the board assurances in the selection process, the farm/golf conflict was not resolved and, as a result, everyone (including the board and the chancellor) turned to me for a decision. I welcomed that responsibility because I quickly realized that I would live with the implementation and consequences of the decision. It also underscored to the college and the community that the authority over the college rested with me. That was an important statement, even though it might have meant having to make an unpleasant decision. Throughout my career, I always wanted the people in the organization to believe that I had the authority and I “was in charge.” Sometimes it was tempting to pass off the decision to people higher in the organization, but I always resisted the temptation. Because of the importance of this issue to the college, I was not going to be hurried into a decision until I had the chance to meet with all relevant parties. People seemed to respect that process and gave me the necessary time. I also talked to people outside the college as well and received some particularly sage advice in the process.

The farm/golf conflict had split the college and the community into equal camps and at odds with each other. Going back to our leadership definition, how could I mobilize people to work together to achieve a common vision when there was an internal “war”? I learned a lot from the walking tour by listening to the rationale and motivation by people on both sides. The save the farm group wanted to preserve a viable agriculture program, but they were not opposed to making changes, particularly ones recommended by agriculture experts. The build the golf course group were committed to using the land assets in a way that was not offensive and would help solve the college’s financial problems. They were not so committed to a golf course solution as much as they were wanting to do something to solve the financial problem. As you might see, it opened up a possible solution without either side winning, by trying to find a common ground. My recommendation to the Board of Trustees was to initially reject all responses to the RFP. I knew from talking to land developers that we could always get an offer that was equal to or better than the one the board was considering because developers did not feel anyone took 200 acres to build a golf course for profit. They told me they only build golf courses to increase the value of adjacent land that would be sold as part of a housing development.

The next step was to convince the college community that we could not commit nearly half of our acreage to any alternative use without both a long-range master plan and a facility plan that explored alternative revenue-generating solutions and that examined the appropriate role of an agriculture program in Woodland Hills in the year 2000. I explained the need for this solution to the leaders in both camps and gained their support. The planning process began by engaging an

expert to lead the effort (Cynthia Sherrill, a former Vice President at Gensler Architecture) and it would operate under the auspices of the Pierce Planning Council under the new leadership of James Rikel (Department Chair, Life Sciences). Simultaneously, we would begin a series of symposiums to address the agriculture program. Both efforts were sponsored by the Parson Foundation. This solution brought temporary peace to the conflict even though I said the process did not preclude any outcome (including building the golf course). What we all agreed to was that the outcome would be based on careful analysis and hopefully result in advancing the greater interest of the college. All parties agreed to the process and went to work to build the best outcome for the college. I was fortunate that everyone listened to reason and found the processes to be fair and rational with the hope that the outcome would be better than anything considered up to this time. Maybe my teaching skills turned out to be a real asset in helping people understand why these processes work and why in this situation they were necessary. It also helped that I had been responsible for long-range and facility planning at SMC so I could talk with both experience in analytics and process knowledge. I had also worked with Cynthia at SMC in a manner that gained consensus in the final product at Santa Monica College. Breadth of experience is a real asset to a new president.

I think this temporary solution to the farm/golf crisis did a lot to help bring the college together and to establish some credibility in my leadership. We had created a process that was agreeable to everyone, people felt that prior to my arrival they had put the cart before the horse and that we needed a good planning process before making that type of commitment. People felt the planning process would create a good solution to both addressing the financial problem and rejuvenating the agriculture program. It also helped that I was able to find the people and the resources to make the process viable. The Board of Trustees and the Chancellor also liked how I found a peaceful solution that did not put them on the spot to declare a winner and a loser in the conflict.

I need to pause here to mention two other circumstances that helped to make this action workable. First, early on in my presidency, I had done a lengthy interview in a newspaper (Valley Business Journal) about my background, my approach and my preliminary thoughts on the future of the college. Shortly, after the article appeared, I received a handwritten letter on a plain piece of paper requesting a meeting with me and signed Joe Hurley (with no title or address). I asked everybody at the college in an attempt to find out anything about him. No one knew him. About two weeks later a man appeared in my doorway (which was always open) and said, "I am Joe Hurley, and I would like to meet with you as I requested in my note." I invited him in, and it was the beginning of a long and happy association. Joe Hurley was the President of the Parsons Foundation. He had read the interview, liked what I had to say and wanted to help. The Parsons Foundation funded a number of projects at the college (my inauguration, a promotional brochure, the agriculture symposiums, etc.), but more importantly they provided a director for the Pierce College Foundation at no cost (Davia Solomon turned the foundation around and put it on solid ground). They also created a \$250,000 fund for me to use at my discretion for fulfilling my vision. Over a five-year period they donated close to \$1 million and never asked for anything in return. It pays to keep your door open and be willing to talk with strangers!

Second, when I was at Santa Monica College, I had been responsible for the development of their long-range master plan, educational plan and facilities plan. In fulfilling that process the college had engaged the Gensler Architectural firm and we worked with two vice presidents from that firm. One of them was Cynthia Sherrill. She was at a point in her life where flexibility of time was the most important to her and she was willing to work as a consultant. We had a wonderful partnership at Santa Monica College, and I knew we could do it again at Pierce. I think she thought so as well. The two came together because Joe Hurley said that Parsons would help pay for the planning process, including her services (remember, in 1999, Pierce was a deficit college so it was hard to fund anything new).

The initial planning efforts began with a series of agriculture symposiums (funded by the Parsons Foundation) in which the college attempted to answer two questions. Did it make sense for a community college in the west end of the San Fernando Valley to have an agriculture program in the 21st century? If so, what should that program look like? Representatives from the various agriculture agencies were invited and involved in the symposiums. They included faculty and administrators from U.C. Davis, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and Cal Poly Pomona (the three agriculture-based universities in California) and Mount San Antonio College (the community college with the most comparable agricultural program). There were also representatives from local farm bureaus and non-profits (e.g., Tree People). Finally, the symposium included industry representatives who ranged from growers (e.g., A. G. Kawamura) to urban horticulturists and landscapers (e.g., Environmental Industries and Valley Crest Nurseries). The answer to the two questions, while sometimes emotionally debated, seemed to eventually gain a consensus. The consensus was that there was an appropriate place for an agriculture program at Pierce College, but it probably needed to look different from the current program. Eventually, the program should have less emphasis on traditional farming and animal husbandry with greater emphasis on selected areas of agriculture. In particular, a greater emphasis on equine (there are apparently 10,000 heads of horses within 10 miles of Pierce), a viticulture program (corresponding to the development of vineyards in the Santa Monica mountains), urban horticulture and landscape design, reestablishment of the farm store with an added feature for elementary school children on sources of food (e.g., a Pizza Farm), and continued support for the veterinary assistant program and pre-vet school students.

If the college could develop a master plan that was not dependent on using the 200 acres of agriculture space for necessary financial contribution to the college, the outcome of the symposium would drive the plans for the agriculture program. Under the direction of the college leaders, James Rikel and with the assistance of Cynthia Sherrill, the master plan process began. Everybody was on board and I had the board of trustees reject all RFP responses. That eliminated the emotional conflict and intra college tensions, but it put enormous pressure on the planning process to be genuine, transparent and collaborative. While I was heavily involved in the process, enormous credit goes to James Rikel (Chair, Pierce Planning Council) and Cynthia Sherrill (Planning consultant) for helping to engineer the process to a successful outcome. Through extensive collaborative efforts, a plan was developed inside the college and then used as a basis of interaction with the external community. It was the start of the critical team effort I wanted at the college, and I think it helped the people of the college have some faith in my

leadership. Everyone, from the board to the students, loves having conflict resolved with a thoughtful, reasonable, collaborative process.

The eventual plan used three proposed public-private partnerships as the alternative funding source for the golf course. The three proposed partnerships were a biotech research center, a senior housing project and a student housing project. The two housing projects did not use any of the agriculture space and the biotech partnership only used a very small eastern portion of the agriculture space. All segments and proponents agreed on this solution and the plan in its totality became the basis for Pierce College's portion of the district's bond issue that successfully passed in 2001. While all the other elements of the plan were equally important, I have not mentioned them here because they were unrelated to the farm/golf crisis and were similar to plans developed by other colleges. The acceptance of the master plan by all parties ended the farm/golf conflict and retained most of the land for the agriculture program and gave them a new direction for the future. It is worth noting that the three public/private partnerships were never built – not because they were bad ideas, but rather because even better ideas were developed to solve the financial problems of the college (see the MTA section of the report).

Enrollment. Besides the farm/golf conflict, which was probably the most emotional issue facing the college, the biggest issue was finding ways to grow the enrollment in a productive manner. The decline in enrollment made the faculty and staff feel as if the college was dying. Everyone disliked the consequences of the decline but there was no consensus as to what caused it or how to fix it. I knew from my experience at SMC of growing their enrollment that the situation at Pierce required a multi-faceted approach. There were three parts to the challenge – increase the FTES of the college, be paid for the FTES by the state and the district, and do it while increasing the average class size so that the maximum benefit was derived from the added revenue. An analysis of the course offerings indicated that there were no real enrollment management practices being used. The schedule of classes was in many cases what faculty wanted to teach at the times they wanted to teach, and the schedule was not driven by student demand. While some progress was made right away, the schedule had a big boost when there was a change in the Vice President of Academic Affairs. When Tom Oliver became the Vice President of Academic Affairs, he was able to work with the academic deans and department chairs to make significant changes in the class schedule. As a result, the college could fund much of its enrollment growth through increases in productivity. This change alone meant that the college would maximize the benefit of enrollment growth.

Enrollment is the life blood of a college – financially and spiritually. There is also a tipping point. When a college experiences a nearly 50% decline, it decimates the morale and financial well-being of the college. As part of my “listening tour” I heard many reasons why people thought it had happened but most of them blamed others and, in particular, something the district had done to the college. In my talks with members of the community, I happened to meet Carol Davis, the owner of Davis Research. I explained my dilemma and she offered to help. She would run focus groups for me at her out-of-pocket cost and I agreed that at some point in the future I would work to have a full contract with her at a competitive cost. It was really an act of charity on her part. We agreed to set up two sets of focus groups. One set would be groups of students

who live in our service area and attend Pierce College. The other set would be students who live in our service area and attend Moorpark or Santa Monica College. In the case of the first group, we wanted their assessment of the college. In the case of the second group, we wanted to know why they did not attend Pierce College since it was closer. I invited various college leaders to join me behind the one-way mirrors and it was hard for them to listen to these impressions which were basically negative from all groups. Nevertheless, for me, it was enlightening, and I left with an understanding of what needed to be done. I kept reminding everyone to not be defensive. The perception of students may not be accurate but it either described situations that need to be corrected or we need to clarify for prospective students a more accurate perception. Here is what we learned from the focus groups:

1. Pierce did not have a strong academic reputation, particularly for transfer students. Both Moorpark and Santa Monica were perceived to be much stronger.
2. The appearance of the college was bad, and students inferred that it represented a low quality of education.
3. There were still questions about the accreditation status of the college.
4. The faculty at Pierce were old and not very caring or welcoming, nor good teachers.
5. There was a lack of technology at Pierce and their high schools had better technology.
6. Because they had a negative perception of Pierce, everything bad they saw reinforced that perception. At Santa Monica and Moorpark, those negative things were seen as anomalies.
7. There was some sense that Pierce was not as safe as Moorpark and Santa Monica College.

When I did my “listening tour” the faculty reinforced my recollection of Pierce in the “glory days” as being the best college in the district. However, I could not find a consistent answer as to what had happened (although many blamed the district for unfair actions against Pierce) to cause such an enormous enrollment decline. The focus groups were critical to my understanding the causes for the enrollment decline. It helped me to understand through the eyes of students both the real problems and the image problems. Surprisingly, even learning about image issues that were false helped us to create information campaigns to correct misinformation. The benefits and information from professionally managed focus groups exceeded my expectations. While I was enthusiastic about the effort to help my understanding, another important element was having the college leaders join me behind the one-way mirror to hear the comments first-hand. We also shared the tapes of the focus groups with a second group of leaders on campus. Letting people share in that direct exposure caused any resistance or denial to evaporate. We could just focus on solutions, which we did. I had not anticipated the secondary benefit, but it was as important as learning why the college had sunk so low in the eyes of potential and actual students. Working with Carol Davis also taught me how to make progress without money by seeking and receiving help from local professionals. It turns out that they wanted to see Pierce turn around as much as we did, and they were willing to help by deferring compensation to future involvement. In this case, we were able to oblige with Davis Research in the future through the UC Irvine partnership

and research project. Once again, relationships matter, and it showed why it was important for me to have as many introductions and interactions as possible.

Using the focus group information along with our own knowledge, we began to build a marketing and public relations plan. I first met with the new chancellor, Mark Drummond, and explained what I had done so far. Having to solve the farm/golf crisis and the enrollment crisis with a deficit budget was unworkable. I made my case for Pierce having a line of credit from the district so that we could have some working capital to implement the plans. As part of the deal, I promised to repay the funds within three years. He agreed and established a \$250,000 line of credit. We never used anywhere near the full amount and the initially borrowed funds were repaid to the district within 18 months.

Once we had the access to funds, we began to implement the plan. First, Mike Cornner agreed to leave his position as an academic dean and become the Director of Marketing and Public Information Officer. I realized he was the missing link on my team. He became the leader of all of the marketing efforts by the college. Mike was also the former Chair of the Media Arts Department. We began by working to create an identity for the college that inferred quality. We developed a quality brochure using a professional designer that started the theme of Pierce College, the Smart Choice. We created a website to promote the college and drove people to the website (piercecollege.edu) through radio and cable ads. We dropped Los Angeles from the title of the college and just used Pierce College – it sounded more prestigious and distinct (all the other L.A. colleges were based on geographic locations). Some people even thought we were a four-year college.

LEADERSHIP QUOTE

“There was excitement about *Rocky*’s arrival because we knew we needed leadership, and he was ready to accept that role. The leadership team realized that enrollment was the key and that it was always the key. The real genius came when Rocky did the new design for our calendar. We advertised how good we were and what a bargain we were. After studying what Pierce did well, we zeroed in on our transfer rate. That was the drum we were going to beat in everything from the radio spots to the catalog, to the class schedule and in talks Rocky gave in the community and it all worked.”

Mike Cornner, Director of Marketing and Public Information

At the same time, we started working with faculty leaders to change the calendar. I had developed a compressed calendar at Santa Monica College that was very successful. I felt we could do it one better with a slightly larger compression. It was a 15-week fall and spring semester with a 5-week winter session and two 5-week summer sessions (with an 8-week overlay for classes that could not be compressed to 5 weeks). I already knew that compression actually improved retention and student performance from my experience at SMC and we had the data to prove it.

There was a lengthy dialog with the faculty to gain their support, but it was aided by faculty leaders who supported the change (especially Barrie Logan). Barrie and I had already had

conversations about the calendar before I came to Pierce, so this was an easy partnership now that we were on the same team with the same goal. The formal calendar proposal needed to be developed and adopted by the college as the first steps. It helped that after the death of the former Academic Senate President, Barrie stepped in and assumed the position.

Because of Barrie's previous efforts, the Pierce faculty were already in a position of understanding how the benefits outweighed the sacrifice (having to perform some redesign of courses), although some felt the across-the-college curriculum redesign was a healthy renewal of the curriculum. The faculty also understood the benefits to students based on the research from SMC that was shared by Barrie. Having the faculty on-board was a big help so we could just work on the specific proposal and to do it in a collaborative manner so that we did not undermine the faculty support.

I will spare describing all the educational reasons for making the change (which are many and are well documented in separate papers) and just talk about the marketing advantage. We would start in the fall after Moorpark (by 3 weeks) and CSUN and SMC (by one week). We would start after Labor Day like LAUSD at the time. On this basis alone, Mike developed an advertising campaign which declared that Pierce College was the one college that started in the fall instead of the summer, but still ended at the same time as the other colleges. He had some humorous ads which mentioned a longer vacation, students could work for an additional week and not go back to school before their small children. It worked. It was a huge boon to our enrollment. We would also add a winter intersession that was new and would represent all new enrollment. Another bump to our FTES.

I also knew from my work at SMC, that here was an immediate FTES payoff in a calendar conversion, provided there is no enrollment decline. Because the weekly contact hours that are used as a basis for the conversion are based on an 18-week semester, there is a three percent growth in the conversion. Also, to protect the academic integrity of the conversion, whenever the new time did not exactly match the requirements of the conversion, the new time was rounded up. This gave us another guaranteed increase. We also had no problem making the conversion of MWF classes to MW classes in the new calendar (necessary to make the time patterns work) because Pierce had so much unused capacity created by the enormous enrollment decline. Nevertheless, the big payoff was the enrollment increase that was created by the calendar change.

It is important to mention the other obstacle - the district opposition to the new calendar. In the end, we were saved by the support of the new chancellor who listened to my argument that, if the district were not going to allow any experimentation or innovation, it would be doomed. Furthermore, I was the best person to conduct the experiment because I had all the Santa Monica experience. I said Pierce would make the sacrifice of going first and finding all the problems and correcting them since this was just an experiment. Portraying it as an experiment was critical. People were far less resistant to an experiment, even though I knew we would never go back to the old calendar; and, of course, I would correct any problems. Of course, the district faculty union also got involved and this is where Bill DeRubertis played a big role in gaining their consent. I worked with the people inside the district office and helped to find solutions to their

concerns (again experience and finance knowledge helped). I wanted to be the only one because I knew we would also draw students from Valley and Mission College. However, they were wise to the situation and asked to be part of the experiment which now gave us a three-college experiment that removed any further resistance.

While the calendar and marketing were the biggest changes that helped grow the enrollment, there were other efforts that helped. We identified some important themes that were added to all of our marketing efforts. We learned that, based on fall headcount enrollment and the number of transfers to UC and CSU, Pierce had the highest transfer rate among Southern California community colleges. In addition, through a somewhat little-known study done by UCLA, we learned that transfer students from Pierce earned a higher GPA in their junior and senior years at UCLA than transfer students from any other community college. While the difference between Pierce and Santa Monica was very small, we were the best. That transfer success became a theme we used everywhere and especially in the high schools. A story was published in the newspapers about that data and the success of Pierce students, so we were able to simply make copies of those newspaper stories and have them distributed at our feeder high schools. The combined effort did a great deal to overcome the poor academic performance image we heard about in our focus groups – particularly in comparison to Moorpark and Santa Monica.

We also wanted to add activities that would attract news attention and give the college some cache. We started a radio ad campaign and as part of the ad campaign the radio station provided the Laker girls for an opening of school welcome celebration. On another occasion, we created a big deal out of the first day to sign up for classes (food, giveaways, etc.) and it created long lines at the admissions office. Newspapers covered the event, and it showed how popular Pierce had become and that students were flocking to enroll.

LEADERSHIP TEAM QUOTE

“Minimal contact and follow through had spoiled our relationship with our feeder high schools. We worked to restore that relationship with many activities based on the idea that we wanted to help the high school counselors with various challenges that they faced and to develop a positive problem-solving relationship with them. Their eventual confidence in the college was passed along to their students.”

Joy McCaslin, Vice President, Student Affairs

Pierce College at one time had excellent relations with its feeder high schools. However, that had disappeared in recent years and SMC had moved into those high schools. Through the efforts of Joy McCaslin, she and I set up a schedule to visit every one of the feeder high schools. In most cases those visits included a meeting with the principal, a meeting with the college counselor and a tour of the campus. We not only tried to sell the college, but we also tried to start the creation of a new relationship. We asked each high school what we could do to help them, and we assured them of ready access to both Joy and me. From these visits, three distinct programs were developed – an annual program at Pierce for principals and counselors in which we showed them

how we were changing the college and what was new at the college. We also began offering selected Pierce College classes at each high school. The other new program was a high school outreach counselor from Pierce made regular visits to each high school to aid in capturing graduates through application and testing workshops. We also hired a part-time counselor from SMC to take the lead and serve in this capacity. Ironically, her name was Karen Pearce! (She was willing to leave SMC because she was a new mother and only wanted to work part-time. We also provided a much shorter commute for her and flexible hours). This was another effort to attract capable people we could not otherwise afford by being willing to fit the job to meet their needs. Also, it probably didn't hurt that Karen knew me from my time at SMC. She was relatively young, vivacious and enthusiastic about Pierce which was precisely the image we were trying to display. As you might guess, in all of these efforts, we made ample use of the transfer studies through distribution of the newspaper articles.

The college classes at the high school sites quickly evolved into a very successful program that increased enrollment for the college and helped to cement the relationship with the feeder high schools. Fairly early on, we hired Sam Mayo (a retired administrator from Valley College), who had extensive contacts with administrators at the local high schools. His enthusiasm for the program and his contacts soon built a wonderful collection of college classes at the high school. Through the combined efforts of Joy, Karen and Sam, SMC was removed as a presence in our feeder high schools and the change was another significant contributor to our enrollment growth. Through all of these programs and efforts, the college had a 20% increase in Fall, 2000 (as compared to Fall, 1999) of recently graduated high school students enrolling at Pierce.

In coordination with Mike Cornner (he focused on print and I focused on public speeches outside of the college), we worked to repeat as much as possible a number of pointed messages that were designed to help change our image. First was the academic excellence of Pierce. We used the transfer reports and when we talked about the faculty, we trumpeted the fact that we had a higher percent of full-time faculty (by far over Moorpark and SMC) than any other community colleges or the lower division of four-year universities. In so doing, we discussed the value of full-time faculty in terms of availability and experience. This was an effort to take a problem (perceived age of our faculty and the cost of having so many full-time faculty) and use it to our advantage. In conjunction with this effort, we clarified any continuing misunderstandings from the deferred accreditation in 1995. Finally, we clarified how the farm/golf crisis was being resolved. These messages changed over time as circumstances changed (e.g., passage of the bond in 2001, the creation of new partnerships), but in the beginning these were the messages we repeatedly delivered.

We developed guaranteed transfer agreements with all UC campuses (except Berkeley who would not enter into any new agreements) and CSUN. That helped us to convey our special relationship with the entire University of California system. In addition, we were also working on a joint viticulture program with UC Davis and a Fast-Track Honors program with UCLA. The Fast-Track Honors program with UCLA targeted a select group of high school juniors who could enter the program while in high school and, with one additional year of work at Pierce following high school graduation, they could transfer as juniors to UCLA.

We also knew that we needed to craft an image of Pierce being unique and distinctive - especially in the area of transfer. Pierce had an ample natural draw area for new students, we did not need to steal students from other colleges. However, we needed to stop others (particularly SMC and Moorpark) from “stealing” our students. Both of them had based their reputations on transfer so we needed to convince students that we were not only equal, but better. One of our strategies was to create unique partnerships. We created many unique partnerships with universities, but the crowning jewel was the creation of two unique partnerships – one with Cal Tech and one with UC Berkeley. It is important to recognize that my relationship with Joe Hurley, the President of the Parsons Foundation, created the critical first step in the creation of these two partnerships. After talking to Joe, he informed me that the Parsons Foundation was a large donor to both institutions and that he could arrange for me to meet with David Baltimore, the President of Cal Tech and Robert Berdahl, the Chancellor of UC Berkeley. In both cases, I came to the meeting with data showing the success of Pierce College transfer students at four-year universities. On top of that, we developed two unique partnerships. The first one was with Cal Tech in which we created the Frontiers of Science program. Cal Tech would send their most prestigious faculty (including Nobel prize winners) to spend time at Pierce. During the visit they would meet with our best students in the visitor’s field, they would meet with our faculty, and they would make a public lecture on their current research. Beyond the direct benefit, we could also say that we had a unique partnership with Cal Tech, and it was publicized because the lecture was open to everyone.

In the meeting with Robert Berdahl, our appointment was scheduled for the morning of September 14, 2001 (the third day after 9/11 and the first day of resumed commercial air flights). I had faculty members from psychology and the life sciences with me and it was an eerie flight. The Burbank Airport was empty and so was most of our flight. Everyone was somewhat nervous, including the flight personnel. However, the fact that we did it made a huge impression on Dr. Berdahl and, in his mind, showed that we were really serious about the partnership. From that meeting, the idea of the internships in the Wills Neuroscience Institute and having Berkeley faculty join the Frontiers in Science presentations was developed. We jointly wrote a proposal to the Parsons Foundation which funded our request. We identified initially 5, that grew to 10, students to participate in a summer program at Berkeley in which our students would engage in original neuroscience research. Our students were provided with room and board and stipends. Being able to have a newspaper article write about Pierce partnering with Cal Tech and Berkeley were major boons to our image and reputation, particularly because our competing schools who had been “stealing” our students had nothing like it. It truly set us apart. There was obviously no comparable experience at any community college. It was even further enhanced when at the follow up to the internships, the Berkeley faculty were glowing about the performance of our students and said that at times the Pierce students outperformed the Berkeley graduate students. All of this added to the image of Pierce being a premier transfer college. This worked because of a willingness to take advantage of an opportunity by being personally involved and by creating new relationships. It also happened because of a new relationship I had created with Joe Hurley. Education leadership is a relationship business and relationships matter. It also taught me that you have to ask. As long as the request is thoughtful and considerate of the giving required by

the other person, I was amazed by the willingness of both leaders and their institutions to help Pierce. It verified for me that the ask is important.

Along with these efforts, we began to provide a Parents Night to discuss the college. It was an important attempt to deal with the perceived safety issue. We came to learn that it was more of an issue with the parents than the students and it was more of an issue in Calabasas and Agoura than it was with the rest of our service area. We included a presentation by the Sheriff's Department which compared our crime statistics with Santa Monica and Moorpark Colleges. There was not a significant difference. Among some of the parents there may have been an element of white flight, so we talked about the value of students experiencing diversity within a safe environment and the importance of that experience in a college education. Since this was probably a bigger issue in comparison to Moorpark, the contrast was more dramatic than in comparison to SMC. However, the safety issue provided a more dramatic comparison with SMC, especially when the adjacent residential areas in Santa Monica were considered.

We felt that it was also important to not lose sight of everything we learned from the original focus groups. One of the important items was that students did not feel that Pierce was a welcoming institution – both in the classroom and in some of the student service areas. With regards to the classroom, Raymond Wells, a marine biology faculty member, led a committee from the academic senate to tackle the issue of faculty creating a supportive and caring environment in the classroom without sacrificing or lowering academic standards. They created a handbook for faculty that was filled with numerous suggestions for how to accomplish that goal. Faculty adopted many of the suggestions because they realized that they were unintentionally creating the wrong environment and that establishing a more nurturing environment did not mean a lowering of standards. Likewise, in the student services area, the Vice President of Student Services, Joy McCaslin organized a series of customer service workshops for employees in the area. Again, people cooperated because they realized that anything they were doing that turned away students was unintentional. Both efforts created a much more positive experience for students at Pierce.

I have always believed that intercollegiate athletics provides an important link to higher education for a select group of students. With an improved financial situation, I felt it was important to reinstate men's basketball and to initiate women's soccer. In the case of men's basketball, the initial coach was Brad Wright, a former UCLA basketball player. Accordingly, when we did the announcement of reinstating men's basketball and he was the new coach, John Wooden came and introduced him. As you might guess, we received great press coverage. In addition, at a future game the college honored Denny Crum, who coached Louisville to two national championships. His career started at Pierce where he attended as a student and played basketball (before attending UCLA) and was an assistant head coach and head coach at Pierce (before joining John Wooden as his assistant and the taking the job at Louisville). Once again, we received great publicity.

When we started women's soccer, we had to create a new competitive field for the team. At the same time, we were reconstructing parking lot 7. We were told that we had to create a runoff basin for the new parking lot so that rainwater from the parking lot would not flow into the sewer

system. Since women's soccer is a fall sport that ends before it rains in Southern California, we created a sunken soccer field that could also serve as the runoff basin for the parking lot. Because it was sunken, the embankments on the sides of the field served as audience seating. It was truly making lemonade out of lemons, and we never had a rain cancellation! The program has been very successful (at the end of its second year it was ranked 14th in the nation) and with its unique field has also given us wonderful publicity.

Besides the introduction of the new teams, I am also proud of the fact that the men's volleyball team won four consecutive state championships while I was at the college! More positive publicity for Pierce.

With all the aforementioned efforts, the enrollment was turning, and we were starting to get significant enrollment increases. As it started to work, and because everyone was involved, the enrollment increase provided an infusion of energy to the college. We were also on our way to resolving the farm/golf crisis. The next question was how to sustain and build that momentum. Partly by circumstance, I was able to build a great senior policy group for the college with a new Vice President of Academic Affairs (Tom Oliver), a new Academic Senate President (Barrie Logan), a new chair for the Pierce Planning Council (James Rikel) and a new chapter president for the classified union (Debbie Suarens). When put in combination with the three great leaders I inherited (Vice President of Student Affairs Joy McCaslin, faculty union chapter president Bill DeRubertis, and chair of the department chairs Izzy Goodman), I had a great senior policy group. That group built a trusting relationship and I was completely transparent with them. We also continued the town halls, so everyone was informed of what we were doing and why we were doing it. All of that helped to build trust within the college.

LEADERSHIP TEAM QUOTE

"By 1999 I had worked my way up into two administrative roles, first department chair and then Vice President of Academic Policy for our Academic Senate. The latter position was also known as "Chair of Chairs" and served as the academic chair's representative on the Academic Senate Executive Committee. When Rocky arrived in 1999 and shortly afterwards put together his "leadership group" this position was included, and I became part of it."

"The 'leadership group' provided Rocky with a small group of individuals whose positions represented key constituencies of the college and allowed for open discussion about every aspect of Pierce from governance to budget to the classroom. The group was very congenial, no doubt partly due to the confident and mellow leadership style of Rocky, but also because I think that each of us truly respected and liked each other. There were no battle of egos and no one was overbearing. It just took a strong leader to get us to come together and that resulted in us being able to complement each other's talents to the benefit of the college. Rocky helped to articulate and clarify the college's goals and he was open to our input."

Izzy Goodman, Academic Senate Vice President, Chair of Chairs

LEADERSHIP TEAM QUOTE

“Pierce Faculty and Staff had a fundamental suspicion of the primary motivation of past presidents. How does suspicion turn into trust? Upon arriving at Pierce College President Young stated his primary motivation and started forming teams. A team is a group of individuals organized around a common goal. The goal in this case was to see the college and its students succeed. The first team included the primary faculty, staff leaders and the senior administrators meeting weekly. Rather than to separate us by areas of authority, such as, union contract or academic issues, we collectively addressed the central issue, getting Pierce College to succeed in its primary mission. We all believed in that, and we all became team members.”

“As this team went about its work, the message spread to departments and other units in the college. The team became the College and eventually the community, led by a President who respected everyone’s voice.”

James Rikel, Chair, Pierce Planning Council

Physical Presence. The next area needing immediate attention was the physical presence of the college. In particular, there were three immediate issues: the physical presence of the college was so shabby it was affecting enrollment, there was no air conditioning in a significant part of the college even though the college was located in the hottest part of Los Angeles; and parking lot 7 (the primary student parking lot) was in such a state of disrepair with enormous potholes it had become the basis of jokes about the college. These were all a product of the college having stopped all investment in deferred maintenance and we were challenged with no funds to fix the problem. It meant that we had to find creative solutions. All three of these problems were serious because they were affecting enrollment and employee morale so we could not wait for more permanent sources of funds, like the passage of a bond issue.

The state Chancellor’s Office had approved the college to receive funds for the purpose of replacing a portion of the main water line coming into the campus. It was an important deferred maintenance project but not an emergency because the line was still working fine. I had a 20-year working relationship with the state Chancellor at that time and approached him with a proposition. After explaining the situation to him, I asked if we could shift the money to paint the exterior of all the buildings on the main campus (I already knew that the contract would be covered by the available funds). He approved my request even though that is usually not allowed because we had competed for the funds under one premise, and we would use them for a different purpose. That approval allowed for stucco repairs and got all of the buildings painted. I also talked to the gardeners about how to “green-up” the campus. We agreed that it required watering the grass but that we could not afford to reseed, buy turf or fertilize any of the lawns. So essentially, we watered and mowed to keep the grass short because it was as much weeds as grass. However, by keeping the grass short the presence of the weeds was not very noticeable and all of the lawns looked green. The gardeners also helped by strategically planting flowers, many of them bought with their own money. The change in appearance helped and people began to notice a difference.

We also partnered with Valley Crest Companies in which we allowed them to use our campus as a training facility and they would focus the training on improving our landscape. For example, they would use training on sprinkler installation to replace inoperative sprinkler systems in different parts of our campus. We also talked to them about rebuilding and maintaining our Arboretum and allowing them to name it for their company founder (it never happened because my successor was not interested in the project).

At this point we turned to the two bigger projects. The air conditioning problem was tackled in two phases. We instituted an ESCO (energy savings) project through replacing lighting fixtures and making some changes to the existing air conditioning. We then used those savings to pay for the first phase of expanding the air conditioning. At the same time, we wrote an application for a state capital outlay project to complete the air conditioning and in our second year it was funded. The two projects combined completed the air conditioning for Pierce and removed another obstacle to enrollment and faculty morale.

One of the solutions to our problems that was deemed to be “creative”, was in our dealings with Legacy Development. Pierce’s property line extends in a straight line on a map as if DeSoto was straight as it runs from north to south. That means there is a section of land between the Pierce College boundary and DeSoto (outside the southwest corner of the campus) that is privately held (I was told it was the original site for the old Warner home). That land was held by a developer named Legacy and they wanted to build apartments or condominiums on that land. My predecessor had awarded an easement to Legacy Development (for a very minimal amount of money) which would allow Legacy to build a 60-foot retaining wall on the property line and anchor the wall on the Pierce side of the property line with the added stipulation that the college could not use the land above the anchors. The people at the college and the district felt the existing agreement was a done deal. However, during my meetings with external parties, I made a point of meeting with Legacy Development. In so doing, we talked about the wall and whether there was a better alternative. I assumed that developers are always interested in better (and cheaper) ways of doing things that can be a win-win for all of us. They were! We both eventually agreed that a better solution was to not build a wall and to terrace the slope instead. In that way we would remove the attractive nuisance of a 60-foot wall, it would be more aesthetically pleasing, and it would save them money. Pierce in turn would not lose anything because the terracing would occur within the boundaries of the existing easement. While working with Tim Oliver (Vice President of Administrative Services) it took time to negotiate this alternative and for us to convince them that the college needed to participate in the cost savings. We eventually reached an agreement. We would agree to the alternative plan, they would construct the terraces, they would maintain the terracing in perpetuity, the easement would be eliminated, and they would use a portion of the savings to resurface parking lot 7. While we were finalizing the resurfacing agreement, the LACCD passed the first bond (April 2001) and it included a more complete rebuilding of parking lot 7 instead of the temporary solution agreed to with Legacy Development. Since we no longer needed them to repair parking lot 7, we agreed they would make a \$500,000 contribution to the college’s foundation. This contribution, along with the support of the Parsons Foundation was the reason we no longer needed or used the line of credit from the district. Most of that Legacy fund was still in the foundation when I left in 2004.

Parking lot 7 was one of the first large, bond projects to be completed and was an enormous relief to students. By the way, many people in the community who opposed the development on this adjacent property thought this was land that belonged to the college and that this was our development. After I calmed the neighbors, I explained that it was not our land and never had been which ended the discussion!

Was this a creative solution? In hindsight, I guess the creative part was finding the alternative transition, convincing the developer to revise the agreement and share the savings. I immediately did not like the existing agreement and they seemed willing to look at alternatives. Once I found the win-win alternative, it was an easy sell. Sharing the savings was also explained as a win-win because they did not want more public resistance to their development, and it was explained how this could be beneficial publicity. I was always looking for opportunities to make things better and this was the logical sequence of events to that end. People viewed it as creative because revising a deal that was thought to be “cast in concrete”, create a better transition for the college and to receive a \$500,000 donation seemed too good to be true. I am not sure it is creative, but I am always looking for opportunities and knowing how to respond when they present themselves. Maybe that is my definition of being creative in an academic environment.

Another great project was spearheaded by members of the Life Science Department (James Rikel, Kate Kubach and Pat Farris). A one-acre grass quad surrounded by classrooms on all four sides was located in the center of campus. There were virtually no trees in the quad (and given the heat in Woodland Hills) to provide shade, so students rarely sat on the grass. The Life Science Department, whose classrooms were on the south side of the quad, approached me to ask if they could convert a small corner of the quad to a native plant garden that could be used with their students. Once they convinced me that it would be attractive, not an eyesore, I asked them to work towards converting the entire quad (be careful what you ask for)! Like most efforts at the beginning of the turnaround, there was no money, so they needed to help raise the money and provide the labor. They did both. Initially focusing on the south half of the quad, they started by soliciting donations from local nurseries and arboretums. The big financial success came after working with the Foundation director. Through this relationship, they received a major donation from the S. Mark Taper Foundation. They now had adequate resources to complete the first half of the garden at no expense to the college. The second half was completed in 2007 with money from a local bond issue. By the way, they were right, it was beautiful and had far more use by students.

While it is somewhat out of order, this may be the appropriate place to mention the very first bond project in 2001. Prior to the passage of the bond, the college boundary on Winnetka, Victory and DeSoto was defined by a chain link fence. The fence was in some form of disrepair (bent, rusty, etc.), it trapped debris when it was windy and in general was suggesting a prison motif. It was not welcoming, and it was not typical of a college. So, our first bond project money was used to take down all of the chain link fence and replace it with a white, split-rail fence. We found a durable plastic material that was graffiti resistant and was in use for up-scale horse ranches. Once it was up, it gave us a wonderful exterior presence and it no longer trapped trash! Of all the things we did, the fence received more accolades from the community than any other project. It taught me that most of the community makes a judgment about the college from

driving by on the street and they may never come on campus. When the exterior looked so much better, they assumed that everything at the college was better and that the bond was a worthwhile effort. So, after two years we had completed our correction of the most noticeable physical problems – physical appearance of the college, air conditioning, parking lot 7 and the exterior of the college. We also used some of the initial bond money to redo the entrance lobby in the administration building and include artist representations of the new buildings in the facility master plan. This was an effort to have students start to see the future of Pierce and look past any present conditions. Those changes alone made an enormous difference to both students and employees. And that was only the beginning because now we would begin all of the other bond projects.

Financial. Now that the correction of other problems was underway, we turned our attention to the financial condition of the college. Obviously, increasing the enrollment and generating the corresponding revenue was a major part of the solution. The first issue beyond generating the growth was to be paid for the growth. Besides working on the allocation formula for the district so that we received our fair share of district funded growth, we also worked to be sure we had access to any unused growth by the other colleges. It may have helped that I had a background in community college finance and fairly quickly became a co-chair of the district finance committee. At the same time, I conducted an analysis of the enrollment decline at Pierce and felt that a significant part of it could be traced to the aftermath of the Northridge Earthquake in 1994 and lasting until 1999. It appeared that the college did not suffer for long due to damage to the buildings on campus. Rather, it was a result of damage in the community. There were so many red-tagged homes and apartments in the Pierce service area that it caused a population decline. The college (or district) should have applied to the state for a period of forgiveness in apportionment until the community rebounded, but it did nothing. Accordingly, with the enrollment decline, the base declined and within the district the FTES was given to other colleges (most notably East) and Pierce was being forced to recover through growth allocations instead of base restoration. As I was making appeals to the state to increase our base, something fortuitous happened. The state community college system started to generate unused growth funds so that any college that could grow had their FTES funded. The state system was struggling with growth because of shared demographic changes that did not affect Pierce because we were just attracting back FTES we should not have lost. As a result, our growth FTES was funded and most of our financial problems were solved.

However, we did not stop there. As mentioned previously, Pierce had productivity numbers below state standards. Under the leadership of Tom Oliver (V.P. of Academic Affairs), working with department chairs and academic deans, the schedule of classes was totally revamped to become a student demand driven schedule. Faculty also did their best to add students at the beginning of the semester so that classes ran at capacity. The productivity at Pierce became one of the best in the district and comparable to other successful colleges throughout the state. The significance of this change, along with the calendar change, was that the growth was being generated without a corresponding increase in expenses. Therefore, a much higher percentage of the additional revenue was available to solve other problems.

We also made some other changes to help our financial situation. We created a budget process in which we saved money first and then figured out how much we could spend on one-time expenditures from our savings. Previously, money was spent within the year the savings would have occurred and sometimes those savings were over estimated. We worked to reduce our full-time/part-time ratio by encouraging retirements through the creation of “emeritus faculty” in which faculty could keep their office for 2 years and would be guaranteed some part-time assignments (without a guarantee of what class or what time). We also did not have many replacements for retirements until we could get our ratio in-line with rest of the district. This is a common problem in districts with enrollment declines because as the contraction occurs, part-time faculty are not rehired, and the ratio keeps going up. In addition, we worked with our faculty union leaders (particularly the local president, Bill DeRubertis) to create within the contract a load banking provision. Besides the benefit to the college of faculty deferring compensation, there was an added provision. To become eligible for participating in the load banking provision, a faculty member had to teach the equivalent of a 3 unit class without receiving compensation or load bank credit. That also helped our financial situation. The combined effect of these efforts not only remedied the deficit financing that existed when I went to Pierce, but each year we increased our financial reserves until we clearly became one of the two financial stalwarts of LACCD, along with East L.A.

I was in the middle of these financial strategies because when I first went to Pierce, there was no Vice President of Administrative Services and I did both jobs. In my second year at Pierce, when I had filled the position with Tim Oliver, I initially stayed involved because Tim came from the private sector and I helped him learn the community college financial aspects of his job. We worked as a team. There was also a benefit from my involvement in community college politics in Sacramento. It allowed me to plead a case for a refinement in the definition of the full-time faculty obligation. As a result, we were able to reduce the number of full-time faculty through attrition and replace them with adjunct faculty while fully meeting our obligation. This created more savings for us and brought us in line with other colleges.

Community. While the college was well on its way to solving its primary problems, there was more work to be done. In particular, we wanted to have positive relationships with the external world – newspapers, community groups and locally elected officials. Mike Cornner, in his role as the Public Information Officer, led the effort to restore good working relationships with local newspapers. He met with all of the relevant reporters for both the Daily News and the Los Angeles Times. He reassured the reporters that he would always be available to them and when appropriate, I would be available to them. We also both met regularly with the editorial boards of both papers. As positive relationships developed, Mike was able to provide positive articles to the newspapers and they were published. Also, they did not just publish negative articles without learning our side of the story. Mike also helped coach me on when to respond, how to respond and when to let it go (e.g., letters to the editor), by pointing out that at times a story would just die if I let it. All of this made an enormous difference in creating a positive image of Pierce and nothing makes trustees happier than positive news stories about one of their colleges!

When it came to elected officials and community groups, I was able to provide a special assignment to one of the college's part-time political science faculty members, Jim Dawson, to help me with this effort. Jim was a former chief of staff for our local member of the Los Angeles City Council and as a result knew the players and the processes. With regards to elected officials, Jim helped me arrange meetings with all of them and just exchange ideas when we did not have anything we wanted from them. That also led to our keeping them informed about the college so that they were never surprised by a newspaper or a community member. Jim had a wonderful idea of creating a regular meeting with staff members of elected officials. He organized periodic breakfasts for them in which I would provide the update. It gave them all access to me and made sure their office always knew what was happening or about to happen.

LEADERSHIP QUOTE

"In the area of community relations, I was somewhat taken aback by the initial skepticism that we encountered in the community. Delving deeper, we saw this was due to years of sporadic contact and little follow through on the part of the college. Community leaders rightly expected that a large college in their own neighborhood would be responsive to mutual concerns and projects. We worked to change that feeling. I remember that the City of Los Angeles formally created Neighborhood Councils around that time, and Rocky recognized right away that I should be elected to it. I could then intervene if problems arose and control the narrative about the college. It was just one of many activities we did to change the relationship."

Jim Dawson, Director, Community Relations

Most community organizations were very supportive of the college and appreciated our efforts of keeping everyone informed about our master plan and the resolution of the farm/golf crisis. I made a personal effort to be the one to make these presentations because it added credibility to them, gave me a chance to meet the community with a specific purpose at hand and helped to create a more receptive community to our bond proposal in 2001 and 2003. However, there was one community organization that was more of a challenge – the Woodland Hills Homeowner Organization (WHOO). They had a long history with my predecessors of being combative with proposed changes to the college. They felt that it was their role to be the community watchdog over the college. In particular, they were committed to preserving the 200 acres of land in the agriculture program to its historic uses and to that end had a very close tie with a faculty member in the agriculture program with the same agenda. Since the leaders of WHOO were retired, they were willing to go to any public meeting or the newspapers to advance their cause. Over time, through extensive contact by Jim and me, both separately and together, we converted them from opponents to supporters of the college. It was something that most people thought was not possible, but by appealing to what was in the best interest of both the college and the community, by being positive rather than combative, and by finding projects that we could both support, we slowly developed a constructive working relationship that has lasted long after I left.

The root of the problem with newspapers, elected officials and community groups was how they were treated by my predecessors. I don't know the details or the history, but prior to my arrival I

was told that there was no contact between the president and any of these external people or entities. It meant that negative feelings and negative stories were felt and told by all of them. This community reaction just further tarnished an already negative image of Pierce College.

I was also able to give a release time assignment to the chair of the business department, David Braun, to work as a liaison to local companies and businesses. His efforts resulted in contract education and opened the doors to additional partnerships.

Mike, Jim, David and I encouraged all employees to be good community ambassadors. That meant telling people where they worked, telling people about the good things happening at the college and showing pride in the college. To aid in that effort, we created two programs. First, by working with the foundation, we asked all employees to make a \$20 donation to the foundation and in turn they would receive a Pierce golf shirt and Pierce hat (or visor). We asked everyone to wear the items when they were out in the community to demonstrate the popularity of the college. At the same time, it gave me an important element in fundraising by showing a very high percent of employees supporting the foundation. The second item had to do with the parking decal. We changed it from a hanger for the rear-view mirror to a decal affixed to the rear window and made it larger with the name Pierce more visible. When the parking permit is a hanger, people have to remove it when they leave campus, whereas a rear window decal is always displayed. Also, placing the decal in the rear window gives more visibility as the person drives around town. The more decals people see, the more they think a lot of people are going to Pierce. Anything we could think of that increased our public visibility we did.

Partnerships. One of the hallmarks of these years at Pierce was the creation of partnerships. Partnerships with the University of California (especially UCLA, Berkeley and Davis) and the L.A. Unified School District have already been mentioned, but that was just the beginning. The college developed numerous partnerships that included: equipment donations from Port Hueneme Naval Station, furniture donations from Washington Mutual and micro turbine donations from AQMD. We partnered with the U.S. Forestry Service to provide students with an archaeological dig site. Environmental Industries agreed to use Pierce as a training site and in return installed new sprinkler systems and plantings at the college. Another opportune partnership was with CSUN. I had a long-standing relationship with the president and so it was logical that she turned to Pierce to help solve a problem. CSUN was going to rebuild their football stadium and they would need two-years in which they played football at another site. They asked if we were interested in providing the site. The schedules would be coordinated so there were no conflicts, and they would pay all direct costs. In addition, they would pay a lease fee of \$120,000 up front for the assured use of the field for those two years. With the help of Bob Lyons (Director of Athletics) we agreed. Six months after signing the agreement (and before ever playing a game at Pierce), CSUN eliminated football. Since there was a no cancellation clause in the contract, we were able to keep the money and I still kept my friendship with the CSUN President. She was still grateful for our willingness to step up and help and viewed our payment as part of the cost of cancelling football.

There were also two other partnerships that were out of the ordinary. The first one was with UC Irvine. They fully funded a grant to examine how students make their transfer decision and in

particular how students could be redirected from UCLA to Irvine. It gave us great information on transfer but equally important it gave me an opportunity to contract with Carol Davis (Davis Research) and repay her help to us in running the initial focus groups. She always remained as a friend to the college and someone I could call on whenever necessary. Another unique partnership was with the Las Virgenes Water District. They had a solid waste treatment facility within our service area. They had to spread treated solid waste on agricultural fields and grow plant material to extract the nitrogen from the waste. The plant material that was grown was perfectly safe but not very attractive to the public. However, in a partnership with us, they grew grains that served as food for the animals within our agriculture program at no cost to the college. It was another win/win partnership for the college and helped us to decrease the operating costs of the college. It is this type of spirit that was created at the college and led to numerous new partnerships with the college and the college foundation. We also learned that creating partnerships was contagious and new proposals were continually proposed from both within the college and from the community (e.g., Galpin Ford, Amgen). All of these had a wonderful payoff for the college in terms of direct benefits but also in terms of our public image.

Because we were trying to increase enrollment, I decided to create an educational program for seniors. I had been involved in a similar creation at SMC and I thought it would be beneficial to the community seniors and help the college. It was named Encore. In an effort to get the program up to speed as quickly as possible (Susan Aminoff agreed to take the lead, followed by Diane Levine) and to provide some support services when we had no money, we entered into a partnership with a non-profit program called Oasis. The curriculum was divided so classes that were not eligible for state apportionment were provided and Pierce would provide the classes that were eligible. The partnership worked, the program took off and a wonderful new program was created for seniors (even though the state has subsequently reduced its apportionment support) and has really blossomed under the current director, Ida Blaine.

It is important to remember that when I came to the college, Pierce had an operating deficit and my predecessor had been fired for not balancing the budget. That meant that all of these changes had to be implemented with no discretionary funds in the budget. We only had a portion of the loan from the district and eventually the help of the Parsons Foundation. Most of the new ventures did not cost money. The growth in FTES was done through restructuring the class schedule and increasing productivity. The high school outreach was mostly done with our own labor. The calendar change was free. We restructured state facilities funds to improve the appearance of the college. The partnerships did not cost anything and in some cases (e.g., Legacy Development and CSUN) generated new discretionary funds. We also tried to hire the very best people to help us with the change and fortunately were able to do it at greatly reduced prices because we were willing to be flexible and build the jobs around their needs (e.g., new mothers – Cynthia Sherill, Karen Pearce; retirees – Sam Mayo). Finally, we also implemented numerous cost-saving devices that not only saved money, but improved the college.

LEADERSHIP TEAM QUOTE

What I remember is all the unique educational ideas and programs that were developed and implemented. The trips and all the organizations that helped the educational transformation of Pierce College. What a miracle.

Tom Oliver, Vice President, Academic Affairs

MTA. With this as a background, it is now time to return to the college master plan that had been accepted by all parties in the college and the community. The college's master plan, with its three public-private partnerships, provided a financial alternative to the golf course and left nearly 200 acres still committed to the agriculture program. However, we have not explained why the public-private partnerships were never built. During this master plan process, I initially explored the idea of a ride-share lot with the City of Los Angeles. As part of that discussion, I also began to meet with the MTA (Metropolitan Transit Authority). The MTA was finalizing its plans for building a dedicated bus line on the railroad right-of-way on the north side of Victory Boulevard (it is now known as the Orange Line). The EIR for the line required the creation of public parking lots to support bus riders and while the plans were near completion, they were short of the required parking in Woodland Hills. The college happened to own a plot of land on the northwest corner of Winnetka and Victory that was adjacent to the railroad right of way. The land was currently serving as a temporary site for the childcare facility, but the master plan called for the facility to be relocated to the main campus (it was deemed inappropriate to be the only college facility located north of Victory). The MTA was interested in making a deal because the lack of parking in Woodland Hills was the only serious obstacle to implementing the new Orange Bus Line. The value of the land was appraised by an independent appraisal service at \$4 million. I told the MTA that we did not want to sell the land but that we would enter into a long-term lease. With the help of Tim Oliver, the deal was finally struck. There would be a 40-year lease of the land to the MTA. The MTA would pay the college the full value of the lease up front, which was negotiated at \$5.4 million. In addition, they would create a Pierce College station and use the balance of the land to build parking. The parking would be unrestricted public parking and maintained by the MTA. The result was that everyone was happy. The MTA had their parking and could proceed with the bus line. Pierce had \$5.4 million to more than offset any income that would have come from the golf course lease. Furthermore, the college only gave up land that was not planned for any future use in the facility master plan, the MTA created a Pierce College station and since the parking was a public parking lot, it also served as an overflow lot for the college that would be built and maintained by the MTA. Furthermore, since the land was leased, the funds could be used by the college however it deemed appropriate whereas if it had been sold, it could only be used for capital expenditure. Also, the land could be returned to the college in 40 years if it was deemed necessary for educational purposes. It was another win-win solution for both the MTA and Pierce College. Incidentally, when the Board of Trustees accepted the funds, they agreed that the funds would be held in trust for the college and that the interest (or return on investment) on the funds would go to the college, in part, to help with the

maintenance and improvement of the college's large land holdings (425 acres). Therefore, there was no need to proceed with the public-private partnerships. Besides, with the dramatic enrollment growth in the college, there was no longer a financial problem at the college.

Other Original Challenges. Simultaneously, with all of this activity, we also went to work on the other challenges facing the college.

1. The college had a very successful accreditation visit in 2001 in which the college received an unconditional reaffirmation of its accreditation with no required midterm visits. There were 7 recommendations – 4 for the college and 3 for the district. The college recommendations were really aimed at the suggested next phase of the college's evolution and not as criticism of any current practices. There were also numerous commendations. As a member of the visiting team said at the exit interview, "it doesn't get any better than this."
2. The publicity of this action finally put to rest any misunderstanding of the college's accreditation status.
3. Once the college lowered its full-time/part-time ratio to 69% through the aforementioned actions, the college began to hire new full-time faculty, which in turn lowered the average age of the full-time faculty.
4. External relationships with the community, the newspapers and elected officials had been repaired which generated enthusiastic support for the college.
5. The participatory governance process was streamlined by removing duplicated efforts (situations where a committee made a recommendation to a larger body and then had the whole issue discussed again and voted on again). Either the committee was empowered or eliminated. In addition, a new group was created composed of the leaders of the academic senate, the local faculty union, the classified union, the chair of the department chairs committee, the chair of the Pierce Planning Council and the associated student body president, the three vice presidents and the president of the college. That group became a true policy advisory group to the president and a clearing house for issues being discussed through the participatory governance process. The group became incredibly important and influential because of the trust that was created among all of the members. It was a wonderful group for me to work with, but it was not possible until the right people assumed these leadership positions and trust among us was established.
6. Pierce College replaced Santa Monica College as the provider of college classes in all of Pierce's feeder high schools.
7. The college had reestablished the foundation (under the leadership of Davia Solomon) and it had successfully fund-raised for a variety of projects and activities at the college.
8. In an independent survey conducted by students in the UCLA Graduate School of Management, high school students in the feeder high schools stated that Pierce College had an equal or higher academic reputation than all other community colleges, including Moorpark and Santa Monica.
9. The Agriculture Department, on its own, decided to discontinue the Pierce Rodeo. It was a lot of work for them, and the revenues had declined each year, so they felt it had run its course and I supported their decision. In the case of Circus Vargas, once the rental

agreement ended, it was not renewed. Both of these ended the conflicts with PETA. I am sure they felt that they were instrumental in the changes, but in fact we would have made the same decision even if they had never protested. I did not want to continue the activities just to show them that they cannot influence our decisions when stopping them was in the best interest of the college.

10. The college re-established good working relationships with elected officials, community organizations (especially WHOO), and both local newspapers.
11. The District had passed three bonds (two while I was at Pierce) and plans were developed to complete a thorough physical renovation of the college. However, already the college had been fully air conditioned, the exterior of the campus and the buildings had been improved, the grounds had been upgraded and parking Lot 7 was repaired.
12. The college had a 51% increase in enrollment by my third year at the college and would have continued to grow if the state had been willing to fund more growth.
13. By 2004, the college regularly operated with a surplus budget, had over a \$7 million ending balance and had a "trust fund" of another \$5.4 million. There was also a president's fund in the foundation of nearly \$400,000.
14. By 2004, I believe we had solved all of the original 22 challenges discovered in 1999 through the collective effort of the entire college community. More importantly, the college had developed a pride in the institution and an optimistic view of the future. It was a happy and wonderful place to work again.

All of these initiatives were critical to the revival of Pierce College and, at some level, they were intertwined. Some of the initiatives, such as marketing, while started in the first year, would continue in perpetuity. Nevertheless, I felt that all of these initiatives had to be started, but that it might take at least two years (until fall, 2001) to produce results. The Chancellor was concerned that we were trying to do too much in my first two years on campus. I explained to him that we had no choice. These were interconnected issues and all of them could make or break the turnaround. I also told the Chancellor that, if we could not generate a clear indication of a renaissance in 3 years, then Pierce needed to consider being a quality small college. As you will soon see, it did not take that long.

By July 1, 2001, 2 years after my arrival, the following results had been produced:

1. The farm/golf conflict was resolved, the college master plan and the facility master plan were completed and adopted by the college and the Board of Trustees. The EIR process would be adopted in 2002-2003.
2. The full-time ratio had been reduced from 83% to 75%.
3. The college had experienced a 25% increase in enrollment and FTES with a 24% increase in full-time students without any significant increase in classified staffing, full-time faculty or administrators (beyond the Vice President of Administrative Services).
4. The 15-week calendar had been adopted and implemented.
5. The college produced balanced budgets for both years and in 2001 finished with an ending balance reserve.
6. The marketing plan and the high school outreach program were being fully implemented.

7. The physical plant processes were completed or in progress with enthusiastic prospects from the passage of Prop A – the first local bond issue to ever be passed for Pierce’s benefit as long as anyone could remember. Pierce was slated to receive \$166 million from the bond proceeds.
8. The accreditation visit was a success and Pierce was fully accredited without any additional reporting requirements for 6 years..

It was my belief that in these first 2 years, the efforts had been seamless, in a chronological sense, and that it had all been a part of a two-year effort. By summer 2001, people felt we had turned Pierce around, but we were not yet at a level that we were trying to achieve. We really wanted to make Pierce an exceptional college. To that end, we continued to work just as hard on all of the focus areas and the results continued to mount. Without any significant interruption, these efforts really continued until November 2002, and the results kept increasing. Here are the results in fall, 2002:

1. Enrollment and FTES had now increased by 40% over 1999 and significantly more of the growth was funded.
2. The High School Outreach program generated a 21% increase in applications and 57% increase in enrollments among graduating seniors in the feeder high schools.
3. The lease agreement with the MTA had been finalized, the childcare program was being relocated to the main campus and the college prepared to receive the upfront lease payment of \$5.4 million.
4. The college was no longer in financial difficulty. With the funding from the enrollment growth and continued reduction in the percent of full-time faculty, the college had an ending balance reserve of \$2.5 million.
5. In March of 2002, the state Chancellor’s Office reported that Pierce College’s transfer performance was the highest among all community colleges in Southern California.
6. New guaranteed transfer agreements were signed with UCSB and UCSD. No other community college in California had more signed agreements.
7. New partnerships were created with UC Berkeley Wills Neuroscience Institute, Port Hueneme Naval Station, Valley Crest Nursery, U.S. Forestry Service, UC Irvine, Las Virgenes Water District and the Music Center.
8. An agreement with CSUN was signed that resulted in a \$120,000 “contribution” to the college.

Until November of 2002, Pierce was continuing to flourish. For the fall enrollment, the college decided to not increase the size because we still had unfunded FTES. Wonderfully, the college grew anyway. Everything we were doing continued to work and in fall, 2002, the enrollment grew to over 19,000 students (a 51% increase from 1999).

The turnaround at Pierce College really occurred in three years. By November of 2002, Pierce College was wrestling with the same issues as every other successful college – passing and

implementing bond issues, passing and implementing campus EIRs, dealing with a revenue reduction from a state financial crisis, etc.

I have not provided details of how Pierce successfully navigated these other challenges because they were not unique to Pierce. However, equally important, my 9-member senior advisory group and the general college processes were every bit as effective in the new challenges as they were in the turnaround. The leaders effectively engaged their constituencies. We augmented these normal processes with town halls that I hosted. All-in-all, it was very reassuring. We could work as well in crisis as we did in growth. We could handle the negative as well as the positive. For me, it showed a significant transition to normal operations!

Throughout this report I have included comments from the members of the Leadership Group who are still available to provide input. I had asked each of them to provide me with their reflections as to why Pierce was able to accomplish a turnaround in such a short period of time. I asked them to keep their comments brief. However, one member felt it was important to write a longer comment that reflected his constituency's feelings. Accordingly, I have included his quote in its entirety.

LEADERSHIP TEAM QUOTE

The "Miracle on Winnetka" is a reference to the period of Pierce College history stretching from the early 1990s to the early 2000s. During this time the College experienced the most precipitous decline in student enrollment in the history of the California Community College System. Then, miraculously, in a mere two and a half years student enrollment surged, setting a record for the fastest and most robust growth in the history of the California Community Colleges.

These are the factors I believe were most responsible for this turn around:

1. Campus Culture and Presidential Selection: Long before the California Legislature mandated local senates for community colleges Pierce had a vibrant academic senate and well established tradition of collaborative management. Presidents who respected this reality were among the most successful. Those who did not, fill the ranks of our failed presidents. This was clearly the case from 1994 to June of 1999. During that time Pierce lived under one permanent and three interim presidents, none of whom placed a high value on collaboration. Then in July of 1999, Rocky Young was appointed President. His management style was a superb fit with Pierce. Moreover, he brought years of experience in enrollment management and a thorough understanding of the intricacies of the state budget allocation formula. In my opinion the presidential selection of 1999, was the single most important factor in the miraculous turn around.

2. Restoration of Morale: Campus morale had reached its nadir by the time President Young arrived. Consequently, his top priority was to restore hope, confidence, and trust among a largely demoralized faculty and staff. He proved well equipped to take on this challenge, marshaling an impressive arsenal of interpersonal skills and talents. In short order, morale was greater than ever before and trust in President Young's leadership was very high.

3. The Leadership Group: Soon after his arrival, President Young invited a collection of campus leaders to consult with him and his senior staff on the whole range of issues confronting the College. He christened the body the "Leadership Group". The faculty and staff members included the leaders of the Academic Senate, the academic department chairs, the Pierce College Council, and the Faculty and Staff guilds. Despite the wide diversity of constituencies and interests, the nine-member Leadership Group was universally dedicated to the singular goal of turning the College around.

4. Repairing Our Relationship With the Community: Pierce College always had a special place in the hearts of its neighbors. However, when President Young came aboard in June of 1999, he found the special relationship had deteriorated to a state of open "warfare". As is often the case, the root of the problem was a break-down of communication. Consequently, President Young opened a direct channel of communication between his office and neighborhood leaders. Effective dialogue eventually transformed even the most outspoken critics into enthusiastic cheerleaders for the College.

5. Uncovering the Hidden Assets of Pierce College: Throughout our darkest period, Pierce had many positive stories to tell, nevertheless, Rocky's predecessors were stymied as to how to do this within the confines of a severe budget deficit. The solution was actually rather simple: reassigned time. Rocky fully reassigned the former Chair of Journalism and Academic Dean to the position of Director of Marketing and Public Information, and partially reassigned two faculty members to serve as liaisons between Pierce and the San Fernando Valley business and governmental communities. Soon the preponderance of news flowing from Pierce was positive. The make-over of the College's public image was critical to enticing students to return to Pierce.

6. Redesigning the Academic Calendar: While serving as Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs at Santa Monica College, Rocky Young introduced an innovative academic calendar that proved to be popular with students and a revenue gusher for SMC. Understandably, one of his earliest initiatives at Pierce was to propose a modified version of the Santa Monica calendar. Members of the Leadership Group, in particular the Academic Senate President, were indispensable in generating support for the initiative at the campus and District levels. Meanwhile other members worked to secure the approval of AFT Local 1521 for a MOU granting Pierce authority to go forward with a pilot program. The pilot was enormously successful, producing an unprecedented enrollment surge that lifted the enrollment driven budget out of deficit. A local reporter whose earlier stories lamented the future of the College now referred to Pierce as "The Miracle on Winnetka".

Bill de Rubertis, President of the Pierce Faculty Guild

LEADERSHIP LESSONS LEARNED

1. Leadership is relationship based
 - a. Build trust
 - b. Instill hope and optimism
2. Learn to really listen
 - a. Hear the truth, not just what you want to hear
 - b. Listen to students, not just employees
 - c. Appreciate the importance of perception, even if it is not true. Image does matter
 - d. Listen to others so you can find the common ground
3. Find a way to convert negatives to positives
4. Be open to all opportunities and be accessible so you know all options
 - a. Always look to create mutually beneficial partnerships
 - b. Make the ask
5. Always be searching for how to make things better for students and the college.
6. Don't take "no" or cannot be done for an answer and try not to make "no" your answer.
 - a. Find a way to create an environment of "yes"
7. Try to have fun and make the college a place where people want to be
8. Everyone needs to be the college's salesperson or ambassador
9. Embrace participatory management but be vigilant about making it effective
10. Deal with problems (especially difficult people or groups) as quickly as possible.

Procrastination gives the problem "legs"
11. Be patient, change takes time.
 - a. Couch new ideas as an experiment or pilot program
12. Look for help wherever you can find it
 - a. Unconventional or unexpected relationships are frequently available
13. Leadership is about using your influence, not your authority. Teach, don't preach.
14. Be transparent
 - a. Be prepared to teach the logic
15. Embrace humor, but not at others expense. Be self-deprecating. Be ready to laugh and smile.

Personal Reflections

While the turnaround was wonderful, it was only possible because of the team that had been assembled and who provided the necessary leadership to support me. You undoubtedly noticed in the preceding descriptions how I was partnered with one of the team members in each of the initiatives and that as a collective they formed the policy advisory group. It was a magnificent team. I am often given credit for the Pierce turnaround. However, it is important to distinguish between my role and all of the other people who made it possible. It is true that I was the leader (“conductor of the band”) and as such was responsible for organizing the effort, infusing positive energy, the source of many of the ideas and the person that assembled the leadership team. Yet, without the team’s work, both individually and as a group, the recovery would not have happened. I was fortunate to find very capable people with leadership abilities that shared my passion and belief in the turnaround. As a result, that commitment, belief and passion cascaded down through the organization. Pierce became a wonderful place to work because of the total feeling and involvement of all employees.

In these instances of dramatic changes in an institution, too often the exclusive focus is on the specific actions and activities that created the change. They are important but may not be

LEADERSHIP QUOTE

“The one thing I remember is that everyone got on board to help make it happen”

Bob Lyons, Director of Athletics

the critical variable. Rather, there are some other intangibles that are critical to allow those changes to occur and the where-with-all to successfully implement the change. The leader must initially build a relationship and a sense of trust with the people of the college and continually nurture that relationship. Once created, the leader must develop the team. They must be individuals the leader can work with and, as a group, can work with each other. They must be intelligent, have leadership qualities of their own and share the leader’s commitment to the task at hand. Pierce did not have the right team when I arrived. Being the wrong person for the team does not mean they were bad people; they were just not the right fit. In some cases, there was no one doing the job (e.g., Vice President of Administrative Services, Director of Marketing). In some cases, it was persuading the person to move on and in one other case it was just unexpected circumstances. It also requires encouraging the right person to step into the role. Never underestimate the importance to a president of building the right team. The other major challenge is finding a way to fund some of the critical people who need to be added when the college has no money. In some cases, we moved people into the position without backfilling their former position. In other cases, we identified an external source of funds for the position (e.g., the Parsons Foundation). We were also able to attract people on a part-time basis (which reduced the cost) by structuring the position to fit personal needs (e.g., a new parent, a new retiree). In the case of Pierce, a significant amount of time was spent building the right team – not only at the senior level but also at the next two levels in the organization. In the end, it was the key to our success.

On a more personal note, I clearly recognize that the breadth of experience I gained at SMC served me well because I was able to accumulate a diverse base of knowledge and an opportunity to meet and work with a wide variety of professionals. To give you a taste of that breadth here is a partial list of my different responsibilities at SMC: business faculty member, department chair, facilities planner, academic dean (at various times over business, 7 different work force development departments including cosmetology and nursing, 3 departments in the arts, the library and the learning center), finance consultant to the state chancellor following the passage of Prop13, Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs (with responsibility for all academic departments and all student services) and Vice President of Planning and Development (with responsibility for long range and facility planning, institutional research, marketing, grants, foundation, administrative computing, and public relations). There was not really any part of a college that I had not been involved with at some point in my career prior to being president. When at Pierce, at one time or another, I used some knowledge or contacts from each of those experiences. I could not have asked for a better preparatory experience for the presidency at Pierce.

I was also fortunate that throughout my entire life I was continually able to have different leadership experiences. Most importantly, I unconsciously developed successful human relations and leadership skills that fit well with my value system and personality. I was not flamboyant, I could not walk into a party and be the life of the party and most importantly, I did not have a personality that would classically be called charismatic, as was portrayed in movies and television as the stereotyped leader. One of the benefits of having many different successful leadership roles was that I came to realize there was no archetype of a leader. Just compare Barack Obama to Mahatma Gandhi to Teddy Roosevelt. I realized that for me it was a case of blending my unique knowledge and skills with my values. It was important to simply refine who I am with what has worked with my expertise for the current leadership demands. For me, an important recognition was that my leadership successes were built on relationships developed over time. Accordingly, the critical first step for me at Pierce was to make myself available and to take the initiative to meet as many people as possible, preferably one-on one or in small groups. Fortunately, I have a personality that is positive, optimistic and enjoys listening to what other people have to say. I genuinely like talking with other people in the college and I also see the humor in everyday life, so coupled with my optimism, the smile is legitimate. I cannot overemphasize the importance of warm interactions and authentic listening. Be sure at the time of the interaction, or at a later date, you show you were listening. If you do all of that, you validate the other person and you begin to build a relationship of reciprocal listening. Of course, I had many other personal values (e.g. being honest and transparent, decisive) that helped with leadership at Pierce and are traits frequently discussed in leadership books. However, once again, these weren't calculated leadership techniques, it was what came naturally to me and were part of my identity by the time I arrived at Pierce. It is only in hindsight that I realize what happened and the value they provided.

In small groups, my involvement was perhaps more deliberate. Because I like to listen, I prefer to hear the input from others before expressing my belief as to how we should proceed. In this way, I am gaining a perception of the reasoning and motivation of the other individuals in the

group. Since I had not reached a defined position prior to listening to the discussion, it gave me the ability to incorporate the group's input into forming that position. In this way, when my turn finally comes, I can often suggest a way forward that will gain consensus. I actually wanted to hear and incorporate their input. Also, because I am soft spoken, people have to be quiet and pay attention to hear what I have to say. This timing and method has made me realize that it increases my effectiveness. Furthermore, by listening to the groups input and gaining consensus on the path forward, it is our recommendation, not mine.

As mentioned previously, one of the common questions about my time at Pierce is, "How did you come up with so many creative solutions to the long list of challenges?" I have been fortunate during my career to come up with ideas that just seemed to me to be logical solutions to a challenge or an idea for making the situation better for the college and its students or a logical extension of the analytics. Truly creative people in my mind are reserved for the Leonardo Da Vincis and the Jonas Salks of the world, and I am definitely not one of those. I am more in the Ray Kroc world of creativity. These so-called creative ideas at Pierce never seemed very sophisticated to me and I could not understand why they had not been done previously. Nevertheless, we have discussed most of them within this paper. You can decide for yourself if they were creative solutions.

I feel one other situation also needs to be addressed. It is the situation in which peers outside of Pierce associated "luck" with our success and the comment of luck was made when an unusual number of opportunities presented themselves to me or the college when they didn't feel it happened to them. I heard this when I was the President of Pierce College from other college presidents and the LACCD Chancellor. For example, they would probably cite the deals I made with the Metro Link Orange Line, CSUN and the Parsons Foundation. What they did not understand was that I spent a significant amount of time cultivating as many partnerships as possible and many of them did not pan out. These three partnerships did work after a significant investment of time. Also, my style was to always be available to pursue a possible partnership (have lunch, go visit, respond to someone at my office door, initiate contact, etc.). None of those partnerships just happened. There may have been some luck involved, particularly where one path led to another better path, but again these happened as a result of prior efforts and the relationship that had been formed. I think these colleagues thought I was just sitting in my office and a great deal walked in! Nothing could be further from the truth.

I learned early on that I needed to explore and pursue all opportunities. Many of them did not amount to anything or something very different from what I originally perceived. Some of these were a result of a casual conversation at a social event, while others were a deliberate pursuit either in writing or in person. The other avenue that worked was public meetings or newspaper publicity on what we were trying to do at the college which in turn generated people approaching me with ideas or suggestions. The point is, once again, that these "lucky" opportunities were really a product of a great deal of hard work and from listening to others so I could find the common ground. The other benefit from this approach was that even if it did not result in an "opportunity", the contact and effort was great public relations for the college and at least created a new supporter for the college. I might also add, as we were successful at Pierce, people within

the college came forward with new ideas and new proposed partnerships that they developed. It was all part of an environment that tried to say “yes” to suggestions rather than “no”.

As much as I loved Santa Monica College and my experiences there, the nearly 5 years I spent at Pierce and our ability to resurrect the college was undoubtedly the career experience of my lifetime.

IDEAS FOR THE NEXT “MIRACLE” TURNAROUND

In writing this paper, I wanted to provide a historical record of what transpired, but more importantly, I wanted to provide help to other CEOs and potential CEOs who might be facing similar circumstances. To that end, I have moved past the specific happenings at Pierce and tried to provide a more general outline of suggestions.

After reading the previous sections on the specifics of what we did at Pierce, hopefully the outline presented below makes sense without providing more context or specifics.

1. Before you say “yes” to accepting the job as President
 - a. Is this the right fit between you and the college?
 - i. What is your comfort level with the college service area?
 1. How will you offset shortcomings – language, culture knowledge, life experiences?
 - ii. Is the state of the college what you are looking for?
 1. Good to great, maintenance, turnaround
 - iii. Multi-college district vs. single college?
 1. Both have pros and cons
 - iv. Do you have first-hand knowledge of the college?
 - v. Do you have a preliminary vision for the college?
 - b. Is the board of trustees and/or the chancellor acceptable?
 - i. What conditions or concessions do you need beyond salary and benefits?
2. Before your first day
 - a. Know your identity and your strengths and weaknesses
 - i. Have a strategy that fits you
3. Have a plan for the first month or longer
 - a. The Listening Tour – have a picture of what you are doing and why you are doing it
 - b. Beginning to build relationships with the college community and individuals within it. Start the process of trust building and personal connection
 - i. Walk around and meet people on their turf.
 - ii. Plan meetings with groups
 1. Plan independent meetings with each group leader
 - c. Besides meet and greet, know other purposes
 - i. Begin to define a common vision

- ii. If there is conflict, determine the nature and motivation of individuals within the conflicting groups
 - iii. Build the college challenges list
 - iv. Look for potential team members
 - 1. Look for solutions to your weaknesses
 - v. Build the list of college positives
 - vi. Look for new ideas
 - d. Consciously have a style for the listening tour
 - i. High energy, enthusiasm, optimism
 - ii. Authentic listening
 - iii. Authentic smiles
- 4. Allow time to think about the next steps and the bigger ideas.
 - a. It is easy to get consumed in “the meet and greet” and being present for every college activity that the development of vision and strategy only occurs as a side effort when it is central to success.
 - i. Let the visions reflect your passions
 - b. Be prepared to commit a lot of time to the job, especially for the first 2 years.
- 5. Set priorities and a defined timeline.
 - a. 3 years for significant progress for Phase 1 Priorities and hopefully the whole turnaround
 - b. Develop a common vision for the college as a whole and a strategic vision for achieving the broader college vision.
 - i. Beside achieving the priorities described below, try to include an element that makes the college distinctive and unique, an outside the box radical idea, how to build off the college’s strategic advantages and how to fund all of it.
 - c. Continually focus on the college culture
 - i. Establish trust and optimism
 - ii. Be transparent
 - iii. Use participative management as a teaching tool and as an asset
 - iv. Implement the “Lessons Learned”
- 6. Phase 1 Priorities
 - a. Priority 1, Part 1. Conflict resolution
 - i. Find the reasons for conflicting positions beyond the obvious difference in positions.
 - ii. Start looking for outcomes in which neither side is the “declared winner”.
 - iii. Start looking for common ground - interim and long term
 - iv. Develop a financial plan to fund the desired process
 - v. Find your primary and secondary leaders and involve them in the process as early as possible so they own the process and the outcome.
 - vi. Because the conflict is collegewide, process must be transparent and participative so concurrence is built with each step

- vii. Use mutually acceptable external experts who can define direction without advocating one side or the other (e.g., Ag Symposium, outside developers on golf courses). Harder to argue against accepted authorities.
- viii. If possible, be designated as being responsible for final decision. Defines your authority in all decisions to college.
- ix. First success important. Gives you credibility as a leader.
- x. While resolving conflict removes a negative, it also can give the college a positive - a plan for the future and a place for everyone.
- b. Priority 1, Part 2. Enrollment. Financial solution and raise the campus spirit
 - i. Three constants in an enrollment priority - methods and strategies to increase FTES, to be paid for the increased FTES and to do it in a manner that reduces cost per FTES so as to maximize net revenue.
 - ii. Why are you trying to increase enrollment – are you trying to be bigger or reversing a decline? Is the growth in enrollment strictly for financial reasons, programmatic reasons, political reasons, college culture reasons or some combination. If finances are important, don't forget the cost factor of generating the growth.
 - iii. Start by paying attention to the cost factor. Implement a demand driven class schedule and enrollment management system. Explain the importance of class size and having the college operate at its maximum defined class size (add eligible students to your classes)
 - iv. Do the research to know why the enrollment decline occurred. Supplement data with student focus groups.
 - 1. All leaders need to participate to hear first-hand the focus groups and to ask questions about the research data. They need to own the explanation of the decline.
 - v. Designate the marketing leader. Begin defining the desired image of the college and disseminating positive information about the college.
 - vi. Look for unique changes that make the college distinctive and bolster the image.
 - 1. Get others to help.
 - 2. Utilize partnerships
 - vii. Look for “pilots” or “experiments” that can set you apart from other colleges.
 - viii. Focus marketing, outreach and personnel attention on the feeder high schools.
 - 1. Probably most important demographic. Probably the largest component of your full-time students and biggest FTES contributor per student.
 - 2. Easy to market to them. Defined and captive audience.
 - 3. Do it by building a problem-solving relationship with the high schools.

- ix. Be involved and be there when needed and lead it when it calls for CEO presence.
- x. Look for and promote all forms of positive publicity.
- c. Priority 1, Part 3. Build the team
 - i. Determine who is not a good long-term fit
 - 1. How to make a change
 - 2. How to make the interim work
 - ii. Recruit replacements and additions
 - iii. Examine multiple levels, not just direct reports
 - 1. In some cases, the level below the direct reports is critical
 - iv. Determine how to mold the individuals into a team
 - 1. How to build trust within the team
 - 2. What and to whom specific authority will be delegated
 - 3. When you will work with the entire team and when you will work individually with team members.
 - a. Make sure team members understand the distinctions
 - 4. How to build rapport within team
 - 5. Define expectations
- d. Priority 1, Part 4. Accreditation
 - i. Pay attention to WASC guidelines and training for the development of the self-study.
 - 1. There is nothing unique about the self-study for a turnaround, other than a clear outline of how the college is changing. It might even help to have a separate document that extracts those actions from the self-study format.
 - 2. Once the visiting team sees what you are doing and the progress to-date, they become supporters beyond being compliance officers.
 - ii. In preparation of the site visit, make sure the entire college is knowledgeable about the content and directives of the self-study, especially as it relates to a person's specific area.
- e. Priority 2, Part 1. Physical Presence
 - i. Physical presence matters
 - 1. Potential students and community generalize about the quality of education based on casual physical appearance
 - a. Paint, trash, landscape, perimeter, parking lots, bathrooms
 - b. Do potential students see problems as an anomaly or symptom
 - ii. Financial plan for remedies
 - 1. Local bonds
 - 2. Public - private partnerships
 - 3. Develop an on-going solution for items listed above.
- f. Priority 2, Part 2. Financial beyond enrollment
 - i. CEOs fired for deficits, not lack of student success!

- ii. Beyond enrollment recovery
 - 1. Always try to grow.
 - a. Unmet demand is a positive. Access shortage shows scarcity, desirability of enrollment
 - b. Enrollment cannot be turned on and off like a spigot.
 - 2. Always have some small amount of unfunded FTES as a safety measure and for capitalizing on unexpected FTES funding.
 - 3. Strategize to maximize revenue from the funding formula
 - 4. Encourage increases in productivity.
- iii. Save, then spend. Never run risk of spending money you don't have. Reward saving. Don't save for the sake of saving - show college that saving leads to increased spending.
- iv. Minimize FT/PT ratio while being in compliance with regulations. Don't build a full-time stable of CEO hires beyond the requirement. Resist the temptation of loyalty felt by new hires to the CEO that hired them.
- v. Encourage cost effective retirements
- vi. Load bank with conditions and protections
- g. Priority 2, part 3. Community
 - i. Find an "expert", preferably within the college, who knows the players, both elected and community leaders.
 - 1. There will be some common knowledge within the college and as CEO you can make "cold calls", but it helps to have someone with existing contacts or knowledge.
 - ii. Work with Director of Marketing to build positive relationships with local newspapers and other disseminators of local information.
 - 1. Media will never willingly create a formal partnership with the college, but through building relationships, informal partnerships can be created.
 - iii. Make periodic appearances at community meetings
 - 1. Makes it special and doesn't create an expectation of regular attendance. May have someone else from the college who attends regularly.
 - iv. Engage all employees as community ambassadors
 - 1. From joining groups to wearing college gear to the market. Delineate all of the ways a faculty or staff member can help.
 - v. Strengthen the Foundation and build the contributor base to the college
 - 1. Build in-kind contributors as well as cash contributors
 - vi. Lead the efforts to gain approval of the college master plan and EIR. Use professionals to organize the effort.
- h. Priority 2, part 4. Partnerships
 - i. Always look for win/win situations.
 - 1. Try to avoid saying "no". Instead, keep searching for a way to say "yes". Most partnerships evolve from the original starting point.

- ii. Engage the whole college community. Partnerships are not just the domain of the CEO.
 - 1. Most faculty have contacts within their discipline. Let it be known that the college wants to cultivate those relationships.
 - 2. Be available to support efforts as they develop.
- i. Priority 2, part 5. Negotiating Skills
 - i. Hone your soft but strong negotiating skills.
 - 1. Gaining desired outcomes without endangering relationships
 - ii. Identify people within the college who possess comparable skills.